

The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Scenarios for a Peaceful Solution

The topic we are touching here is one of the most painful and crucial in our world today, having a tremendous impact. You certainly have heard the saying that if we can achieve peace in Jerusalem it will be easy to establish it in the rest of the world.

It was in May of this year that **Israel celebrated the 60th anniversary** of its existence as a State. For many it was an occasion of joy, for many an occasion of sadness, for some an occasion of pride, for many an occasion of shame. Pride because we have achieved to make a desert land a flourishing country, shame because we have to face the fact of a history of 60 years of wars, unending blood shed, suffering, abuse of human rights, offences to human dignity and values, and perpetuated humiliation and fear between people of all sides.

The 60 years of existence of the State of Israel and its suicidal living condition were accompanied by uncountable efforts and initiatives for a sustainable peace in the region and there are hardly more NGOs and peace organizations anywhere in the world than in Israel and Palestine. Yet until today very little has been achieved and the annoying suffering goes on on both sides.

Since some time peace activists and academics on both sides ponder the question **for what reason we all have been failing to succeed in our efforts**. Analysis has shown that in any initiative at least one mayor group has been left out and thus kept opposing the set proposal. Of course there is also the strong resistance of Governments and religious fanatics in both camps which cause mayor obstacles.

While as Israeli I am fully aware and deeply ashamed about the unending provocation of our Palestinian brethren and the permanent abuse of their human rights by the Government as well as some radicals, **I cannot accept a one-sided blame of our people and nation**. Also I want to point out that it is not just occupation, which causes so much pain and trouble, but the also the often overseen but factual deeply rooted neglect of a Jewish entity – as it is often named – in the midst of a Muslim Arab world. As long-term victims of persecution in Europe we Jews are sensitive about this repeatedly pronounced threat which often is not perceived by other people.

Of course the issue of occupation is causing lots of pains and turmoil, but it is only the surface of the conflict. Its real roots we find in deeply rooted mental attitudes, fears and collective partial claims in the psyches of the people.

But you have to realize that Nasserianism is still alive in many countries from Morocco to Indonesia. That is why few Israelis trust that a withdrawal from the “Territories” would bring peace. In this issue we need the support and cooperation of our Muslim friends and partners to bring about a change in this regard.

Further the models and scenarios which are usually presented and proposed in peace camps and conferences were often **based on incomplete or biased analysis and grounded mainly on political or partial opinions and one-sided exclusive claims**, which were just a reflection of the imbalance dominating the region. Many mayor parts of either community felt left out, threatened or even abused in its basic needs and values and thus took a firm stand against its suggestions. Therefore, if we really want to proceed **we need to build on binding universal principles, human values and divine regulations**.

What we often forget or ignore is to remember that God has a plan with all things, but a very special and distinct one for this region and its people. It is for this reason alone that God has released revelations to guide people and humanity at large in their national, social, cultural and political undertakings. Everything which is of concern for our collective lives and future is a question of purpose as well as one of attitude and ethics.

It was the **magnificent achievement of the great former Egyptian president Anwar El Sadat, who in a solitary vision understood and surrendered to the fact that the divine revelations given in the Holy Scriptures are binding and alive. He said: “Here at the mountain of Moses, close to the St. Catharine Monastery, I hit the idea of my peace mission. It is holy and inspired by God. God Almighty will fulfil the destiny of the Jewish people, which began on Egypt’s land.”** With this idea in his mind he approached the stubborn Israeli Government, and acting on its ground he offered his life to make peace between Egypt and Israel, which could further be developed and elaborated as a model for the region. What we would need is an Israeli leader of the format and courage of Sadat.

Nevertheless, today it is King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who promotes the idea of interreligious peace in his initiative.

While being aware that these days the **misuse of religion is a major obstacle for peace** in the world, we should also see that it is not religion in its true and transcendental essence which is the obstacle, but its blinding partial interpretation and purposeful misuse by singular radical groups and religious leaders. Instead of pouring out religion with the swamp, **we have to return to its transcendental source and draw from the crystal clear waters of its revelations and wisdom.**

Our approach, therefore, is **not based on popular opinion or the current political situation, but on a profound methodological and spiritual analysis of universal principles as well as authentic Biblical and Islamic sources.** To do so we need to beware of partial interpretation and oppose the misuse of Scriptures by radical religious groups. Going back to the reflection of universal principles we can clearly perceive, that all problems in the world – both individual as well as collective – are due to not being in tune with God and universe! We abuse divine providence and cosmic moral law and reap its fruits. That’s why it is said in the Scriptures: As we sow so shall we reap.

As long as we will not inquire in and abide with the universal principles and God’s purpose for us and our region we will fail.

God is not partial, but righteous; he is not moody, but constant and persistent; Also there is neither contradiction nor changefulness in God, but only unity, persistence, benevolence and stability in Him.

That means:

Peace and welfare are not a matter of partial interests or negotiations about them, of agreements and bargains, but of abiding with these principles and purposes.

Hence **there cannot be contradiction within or between divine revelations, but only unity and complementarities.**

If we study the ThaNaKh and the Qur'an with an attitude of impartiality and brotherly intentions we will find no contradiction, but mutual agreement. And the Qur'an is explicitly confirming the revelations of the Bible.

Then we will find a just solution for all, which is granting each and everyone his deserving rights, peace, welfare, and good fortune for all.

As said:

“Peace is a reward of righteousness”, or “The meek shall inherit the land”.

Meaning: **The conflict and quest is not on between Judaism and Islam, Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians**, but one between humility and haughtiness (arrogance or superiority claims), meekness and violence, between vice and virtue, light and darkness, true surrender and resistance; **It is a fact that destiny is a matter of inner attitude.**

Instead of discriminating or separating in Israelis and Arabs, Jews and Muslims we should communicate and cooperate with each other and build friendly and trusting bonds of alliances and coexistence across all religious, ethnic, national and political frontiers and labels, and between all people of good will and surrender to universal principles and divine revelations.

But we have to be aware that **it is not those who call themselves religious or observant, but those who are factually in tune with the divine, who are humble, righteous, meek, compassionate and loving, with one word abiding in cosmic moral law and good character, no matter of what belief, faith or confession, seeing themselves as brotherly children of God bestowed with the purpose to glorify Him on the stage of this world.**

We know that the solution will be two independent states with Jerusalem as a physically undivided and socially shared City being the capital of both states. So the question is no more what the solution would be, but how to get there. Yet one serious concern I have is the question of the **Temple Mount. There must be an access for Jews by all conditions.** A Jewish State of Israel without access to the Temple Mount would lose all its meaning, since the promise of God's return to it is the whole meaning of the establishment of Israel as a Jewish State.

While we have to make a strong appeal to the governments of all sides, we cannot wait for their move. As long as governments refuse to move towards jointly acceptable solutions for the coexistence of the two countries – Israel and Palestine – we can only work on non-political levels like economic development or social awareness and the like as to foster and promote social, cultural and economic conditions which mould life-worthy living conditions for people on all sides. Moving from grass-root-levels upwards through NGO's, social, educational, cultural and economic organizations, we can be rather effective in initiating a new social reality on the basis of true cooperation in all of these areas. Starting with the development of a common vision for the good of all, we are then able to set up projects and initiatives for their realization.

And if we want to be effective, we need to leave back the insider attitude who refuse to talk to those who are not of their opinion, but to open up for a reach-out into both edges of our societies. That means we have to include leaders and groups from the fringes, reaching from AIPAC to Islamic Confederation, Jewish settlers to Hamas, orthodox Rabbis to radical Imams.

So the work has to be 1) within our diverse communities as well as 2) between them. That means we need intra- and inter-religious and intra- and inter-cultural talks and efforts.

Finally let me sum up our present conclusions and taken steps:

I) There will be **no political agreement, before** we get to **an interreligious** one.

II) We need to build binational, bicultural and interreligious bonds, teams and alliances committed to work for a common vision and its realization. So far we have:

a) **Interreligious Cooperation**

b) **Joint Economic development initiatives**

c) cross cultural and **integral Education**, focussing on value awareness, ethics and character building

d) **The Jerusalem Scenarios;**

e) presently MK Rabbi Melchior and his Israeli and Palestinian partners are elaborating a model which is compatible with the Initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia;

This is what we have achieved so far on a level of civil initiatives (from grass-root level up to leadership):

- The experience of the interesting fact, that the most successful social and educational enterprises in Israel are those which are led by twins of one Palestinian and one Israeli;

- Further we have a group of economists involved in the development of an enlarged Attarot Industrial Zone to be accessible, controlled and run by business people, institutions and groups from both sides of the green line;

- We have joint economic endeavours and businesses;

- We have shared and mixed educational programs for both kids and youngsters of all ages;

- We have mixed community programs;

(Hand-in-hand-schools, Attarot Industrial Parks, The Jerusalem Scenario by Shlomo Hasson and Rami Nasrallah, etc. etc.)

All these have to be expanded and developed on a large and international scale, for these are the activities which have a concrete impact on people and society and will create a new culture of Peace, mutual understanding and welfare!

Altogether I believe that it is the religious leaders and social entrepreneurs who have to pave the way towards a political agreement and solution.

I also firmly believe in the necessity to foster and develop new cultural and economic bonds between Israel and Palestine, Israel and Jordan, Israel and Egypt and invite others to join etc.

One of our joint commitments is to develop Jerusalem as a place to live, as a center of spiritual realization, and a metropolis of international importance and impact.

Coming together at this auspicious meeting, I do not want to miss the opportunity to invite all of us who are of honest concern in a life-worthy and sustainable solution for the area, to join forces and think about what has to be done and what can be done on our side to bring about such betterments for all of us in the region and the rest of the world. Let us make a commitment for joint efforts and initiatives, each one of us in his field and according to his capacity.

Maybe we also can sign a common appeal to the relevant Governments to take every possible step to promote sustainable peace and welfare for all people.

Thank you!